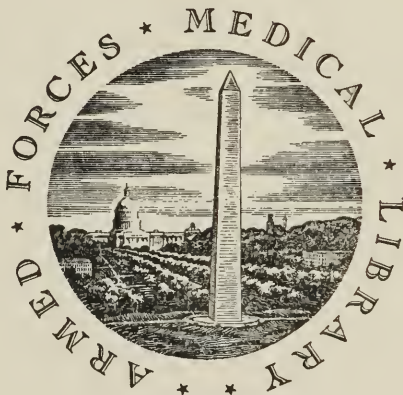




UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



FOUNDED 1836

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WASHINGTON, D.C.





THE  
DREADFUL VISITATION,  
IN A  
SHORT ACCOUNT of the PROGRESS and EFFECTS  
OF THE  
PLAGUE,

The last time it spread in the city of *London*, in the year 1665, extracted from the memoirs of a person who resided there during the whole time of that infection.

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*O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end.* Deut. xxxii. 29.

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S H O R T   A C C O U N T

O F   T H E

P L A G U E.

**A**MONGST the many calamities with which the Almighty is pleased to visit the children of men, in order to reduce them to a just sense of their own weakness and entire dependence upon him, there is scarce any that are more productive of true penitent humiliation, and of a sight of what is really good and truly evil, than those contagious distempers, which an offended God sometimes suffers to rage amongst the people. In the year 1665 the city of *London* was sorely visited by the plague: An account of the progress and effects of that visitation was kept by a citizen who remained there during the whole time of the sickness, and appears to have been candid and judicious in his remarks thereon. I trust my readers may, in a short description of that memorable judgment, meet with such lessons of best wisdom, which nothing can so effectually produce, as a close and serious converse with death and the grave. The introduction of this contagion in *London* was by some goods imported from *Holland*, which had been brought thither from the *Levant*. It first broke out in the  
house

house where those goods were opened, from whence it spread to other houses. In the first house that was infected there died four persons: A neighbour who went to visit them returning home, gave the distemper to her family, and died with all her household. The parish officers who were employed about the sick persons being also infected, the physicians perceived the danger, and, upon narrow inspection, assured, that it was indeed the plague with all its terrifying particulars, and that it threatened a general infection. The people began now to be alarmed all over the town; the usual number of burials within the bills of mortality for a week were generally about 240 to 300, but from the 17th to the 24th Jan. the printed bill was 474. However this went off again, and the frost continuing very severe till near the end of February, the bills decreased again, and people began to look upon the danger as good as over; but in May the bills greatly increased, and the weather becoming hot, the infection spread again, in a dreadful manner.

I lived, says the author, without Aldgate, and as the distemper had not reached to that side of the city, our neighbourhood continued easy; but at the other end of the town the consternation was very great, and the nobility and gentry thronged out of the town with their families in an unusual manner; nothing was to be seen but waggons, carts and coaches with goods and people, and horse-men attending them, hurrying away; then empty waggons

and carts appeared, who were apparently returning to fetch more people, besides innumerable numbers of people on horseback, fitted out for travelling. This was a very melancholy prospect; indeed there was nothing else of moment to be seen; it filled my mind with very serious thoughts of the misery that was coming upon the city, and the unhappy condition of those that would be left in it. By the end of July the contagion had spread and increased to a great degree: Sorrow and sadness sat upon every face; and though some parts were not yet overwhelmed, all looked deeply concerned. *London* might well be said to be all in tears, the mourners did not go about the streets, for nobody made a formal dress of mourning for their nearest relations, but the voice of mourning was indeed heard in the streets; the shrieks of women and children at the windows and doors of their houses where their dearest relations were dying, were so frequent to be heard as we passed the streets, that it was enough to pierce the stoutest heart in the world. Tears and lamentations were seen almost in every house, especially in the first part of the visitation; for towards the latter end people did not so much concern themselves for the loss of their friends, expecting that themselves would be summoned the next hour.

It was a time of very unhappy breaches amongst us; in matters of religion, divisions and separate opinions prevailed; the Church of *England* was lately restored, and the Presbyterians



byterians and other professions had set up their meetings for worship, apart, in which they were frequently disturbed, the government endeavouring to suppress their meetings. But this dreadful visitation reconciled the different parties, and took away all manner of prejudice and scruple from the people. But after the sickness was over, that spirit of charity subsided, and things returned to their own channel again. Here we may observe, that a nearer view of death would soon reconcile men of good principles to one another, and that it is chiefly owing to our easy situations in life, and our putting these things far from us, that our breaches are fomented, and that there is so much prejudice and want of christian charity and union amongst us. A close view and converse with death, or with diseases that threaten death, would scum off the gall of our temper, remove our animosities, and bring us to see with different eyes. On the other side of the grave we shall all be brethren again.

The inns of court were now all shut up, there was but few lawyers to be seen in the city, indeed there was no need of them, for quarrels and divisions about interest had ceased; every body was at peace.

It was also worthy of observation, as well as fruitful of instruction, to observe with what alacrity the people of all persuasions embraced the opportunities they had of attending upon the publick worship, and other appointed times of devotion, as humiliations, fastings and publick

lick confessions of sins, to implore the mercy of God, and avert the judgment which hung over their heads. The churches were so thronged, that there was often no coming near, no, not to the very door of the largest churches. There was also daily prayers appointed morning and evening, at which the people attended with uncommon devotion.

All plays and interludes which had lately began to increase amongst us, were forbid to act; the gaming-tables, publick dancing-rooms and musick-houses, which multiplied and began to debauch the manners of the people, were shut up and suppressed, finding indeed no trade; for the minds of the people were generally humbled and agitated with other things, death was before their eyes, and every body began to think of their graves.

The infection still gradually increased till the middle of August, when there died a thousand a day, by account of the weekly bills, though they never gave a full account by many thousands; many of the parish officers were taken sick themselves and died when their account was to be given in. The parish of Stepney alone had within the year, one hundred and sixteen sextons, grave-diggers and carriers of the dead, &c. Indeed the work was not of a nature to allow them leisure to take an exact tale of the dead bodies, which were all thrown together in the dark in a pit, to which no man could come near without the utmost peril.

I had, says the author, the care of my brother's

ther's house, which obliged me sometimes to go abroad. In these walks I had dismal scenes before my eyes, as, particularly, of persons falling dead in the streets, terrible shrieks of women, who in their agonies would throw open their chamber-windows, and cry out in a dismal surprising manner ; it is impossible to describe the variety of postures in which the passions of the poor people would express themselves. Passing through Token-House yard, of a sudden a casement violently opened just over my head, and a woman gave three frightful screeches, and then cry'd : *Oh ! Death, Death, Death*, which struck me with horror and a chillness in my very blood. There was nobody to be seen in the whole street, neither did any window open, for people had no curiosity now in any case. I went on to pass into *Bell-Alley*, where there was a greater cry than that ; I could hear women and children run screaming about the rooms like distracted, when a garret-window opened, and somebody from a window on the other side asked, *What is the matter ?* Upon which it was answered, *Oh Lord ! my old master has hanged himself.* The other asked again, *Is he quite dead ?* And the first answered, *Ay, ay quite dead and cold.* This person was a Deputy-Alderman and very rich. But this is but one instance ; it is scarce credible what dreadful cases happened in particular families every day. People in the rage of the distemper or in the torment of the swelling, which was indeed intolerable, becoming raving  
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and distracted, oftentimes laid violent hands upon themselves, throwing themselves out of windows, or breaking out of the houses, would dance naked about the streets, not knowing one extasy from another; others, if not prevented, would run directly down to the river, and plunge into the water. Some dying of mere grief as a passion, and some of fright and surprize, without having received the infection. It often pierced my very soul, to hear the groans and cries of those who were thus tormented; but this of the swellings was accounted the most promising particular in the whole infection; for if these swellings could be brought to break and run, the patient generally recovered. Whereas those who were struck with death at the beginning of the distemper, and had spots come upon them, often went about indifferent easy, till a little before they died, and some till the moment they dropt down; such would be taken suddenly very sick, and would run to some convenient place, or to their own houses if possible, and there sit down, grow faint and die.

Death did not now hover over every one's head only, but looked into their houses and chambers, and even stared in their very faces; and though there was some stupidity and dullness of mind, yet there was a great deal of just alarm founded in the inmost soul: Many consciences were awakened; many hard hearts melted into tears; many a penitent confession was made of crimes long concealed. People  
might

might be heard even in the streets as we passed along calling upon God for mercy, through Jesus Christ, and saying : I have been a thief ; I have been an adulterer ; I have been a murderer, and the like ; and none durst stop to make inquiry into such things, or to administer comfort to the poor creature, who in the anguish both of soul and body thus cried out. Many were the warnings that were then given by dying penitents to others, not to put off and delay their repentance to a day of distress, that such a time of calamity as this was no time for repentance. I wish, says the author, I could repeat the very sound of those groans and exclamations that I heard from some poor dying creatures, when in the height of their agonies and distress, and that I could make him that reads this, hear as I imagine, I now hear them, for the sound seems still to ring in my ears. In the beginning of September the number of burials increasing, the church-wardens of Aldgate parish ordered a large pit to be dug, to hold all the dead which might die in a month, it was about forty feet long and sixteen broad ; some blamed the church-wardens for suffering such a frightful gulf to be dug ; nevertheless in two weeks they had thrown more than eleven hundred bodies into it, when they were obliged to fill it up, as the bodies were come within six feet of the surface. My curiosity drove me to go and see this pit, when there had been near four hundred people buried in it. I got admittance into the church-yard, by  
means

means of the sexton, who was a sensible, religious man. He would have persuaded me not to go, saying, *That it was indeed their duty to venture, and in it they might hope to be preserved; but that, as I had no apparent call, he thought, my curiosity could not justify my running that hazard.* I told him, *I had been pressed in my mind to go, and that perhaps it might be an instructing sight.* Nay, says the good man, *if you will venture upon that score, in the name of God go in; it will be a sermon to you, it may be the best you ever heard in your life.* His discourses had shock'd my resolution, and I stood wavering for a good while; but just then I heard the bell-man, and the cart, loaded with dead bodies, appearing, I went in. There was nobody, as I could perceive, at first with the cart but the buriers, and the man that led the cart; but when they came to the pit, they saw a man musled in a cloak who appeared in great agony; the buriers immediately gathered about him, supposing he was one of those poor delirious or desperate creatures, that would sometimes run to the pit, wrapt in blankets, and throw themselves in, and as they said, bury themselves. When the buriers came to him, they soon found he was neither desperate nor distemper'd in mind, but one oppress'd with a dreadful weight of grief, having his wife and several children all in the cart, that was just come in with him, and he followed in agony and excess of sorrow. He calmly desired the buriers to let him alone, said he would only see the bodies thrown in, and go away;



so they left importuning him. But no sooner was the cart turned round, and the bodies shot into the pit promiscuously, which was a surprise to him, for he at least expected, they would have been decently laid in, though indeed he was afterwards convinced that was impracticable, I say, no sooner did he see the sight, but he cryed out aloud, unable to contain himself, and fell down in a swoon ; the buriers ran to him, and took him up, and when he was come to himself, led him to a place where he was taken care of. He looked into the pit again, as he went away, but the buriers had covered the bodies so immediately with throwing earth, that nothing could be seen. The cart had in it sixteen or seventeen bodies. Some were wrapt up in linen sheets, some in rugs, some little other than naked, or so loose, that what covering they had fell from them, in the shooting out of the cart, and they fell quite naked among the rest ; but the matter was not much to them, or the indecency much to any one else, seeing they were to be huddled together into the common grave of mankind ; for here was no difference made, but poor and rich went together ; there was no other way of burials, neither was it possible there should.

*John Hayward*, under-sexton, that is, grave digger and bearer of the dead, never had the distemper at all, but lived about twenty years after it. His wife was employed to nurse the infected people ; yet she herself never was infected. The only preservative he used against  
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the infection, was holding garlick and rue in his mouth, and smoaking tobacco ; this I had from his own mouth. His wife's remedy was washing her head in vinegar, and sprinkling her head-clothes so with vinegar, as to keep them always moist ; and if the smell of any of those she waited on was more than ordinary offensive, she snuffed vinegar up into her nose, sprinkled her head-clothes and held a handkerchief wetted with vinegar to her mouth.

And here I must not omit mentioning the disposition of the people of that day, with respect to their charity to the poor, which indeed was very large both in a publick and a private way. Some pious ladies were so zealous in this good work, and so confident in the protection of providence, in the discharge of this great duty, that they went about themselves distributing alms, and visiting the poor families that were infected, in their very houses, appointing nurses and apothecaries to supply them with what they wanted ; thus giving their blessings to the poor in substantial relief, as well as hearty prayers for them. I will not undertake to say, that none of these charitable people were suffered to die of the plague, but this I may say, that I never knew any of them miscarried, which I mention for the encouragement of others in case of like distress ; and doubtless, if they, *that give to the poor, lend to the Lord, and he will repay it*, those that hazard their lives to give to the poor, and to comfort and assist them in such a misery as this, may hope to be protected therein.

From



From the middle of August to the middle of September the infection still increased and spread itself, with an irresistible fury ; it was reckoned, that during that time there died no less than sixteen hundred a day, one day with another. It was then that the confusion and terror was inexpressible ; the courage of the people appointed to carry away the dead, began to fail them ; the vigilance of the magistrates was now put to the utmost trial. At last the violence of the distemper came to such a height that the people sat still looking at one another, and seemed quite abandoned to despair. In a word, people began to give themselves up to fear, that there was nothing to be expected but a universal desolation. This despair made people bold and venturous, they were no more shy of one another, as expecting there was now no avoiding the distemper, but that all must go, this brought them to crowd into the churches, they inquired no more what condition the people who sat near them were in, but looking upon themselves also as so many dead corps, they came to the churches without the least caution, and crowded together, as if their lives were of no consequence, compared to the work which they were come about : Indeed, their zeal in coming, and the earnestness and affectionate attention they shewed to what they heard, made it manifest what value people would put upon the worship of God, if they thought, every day they attended at the church, would be their last. It was in the height of this despair, that it pleased God to stay

flay his hand, and to slacken the fury of the contagion, in a manner as surprising as that of its beginning, and which demonstrated it to be his own particular hand above the agency of means ; nothing but omnipotent power could have done it ; the contagion, despised all medicine ; death raged in every corner, and had it gone on as it did then, a few weeks more would have cleared the town of all its inhabitants. In that very moment when thirty thousand were dead in three weeks, nay, when it was reported three thousand died in one night, and an hundred thousand more were taken sick, when we might well say, *Vain was the help of man*, it pleased God to cause the fury of it to abate, and by his immediate hand to disarm the enemy. It was wonderful ! The physicians were surprised, wherever they visited, to find their patients better, and in a few days every body was recovering : Nor was this by any medicine found out, or any new method of cure discovered, but it was evidently from the secret invisible hand of him that had at first sent this disease, as a judgment upon us. Let the philosophers search for reasons in nature to account for it, and labour as much as they will to lessen the debt they owe to their maker ; those physicians who had the least share of religion in them, were obliged to acknowledge, that it was all supernatural. The streets were now full of poor recovering creatures, who appeared very sensible and thankful to God for their unexpected deliverance : Yet I must own,

that

that as for the generality of the people, it might too justly be said of them, as was said of the children of *Israel*, after they had been delivered from the host of *Pharaoh*, that *they sung his praise, but they soon forget his works.*

The author, who was preserved unhurt with his whole family, during the time of the sickness, gives in his memoirs a particular account of the many reasonings and fears which affected his mind, before he could come to a fixed conclusion, whether to stay, and take his lot in the station in which God had placed him, or by leaving the city, run the hazard of unsettling himself, and lose his effects which lay scattered among the merchants. At the earnest solicitations of his brother he had concluded to go; but being always crossed in this design by several accidents, it came one morning, as he expresses it, very warmly in his mind, whether these repeated disappointments were not intimations to him, that it was the will of heaven he should not go, which was succeeded by a further thought, that if this suggestion was from God, he was able effectually to preserve him in the midst of all deaths and dangers that would surround him, and that if he attempted to secure himself, by fleeing from his habitation, and acted contrary to these intimations, which he believed to be divine, it was a kind of flying from God, who could cause his justice to overtake him, when and where he thought fit.

But

But what finally fixed him in a resolution to stay, and cast himself entirely upon the protection and good pleasure of the Almighty, was, that at a time, when his thoughts were more than commonly serious upon this weighty subject, turning over the bible which lay before him, he cried out, *Well, I know not what to do, Lord direct me !* at that juncture happening to stop and casting his eye on the second verse of the 91st Psalm, he read to the 10th, as follows, viz. *I will say of the Lord, he is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in him will I trust. Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust : His truth shall be thy shield and buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night, nor for the arrows that flieth by day, nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness, nor for the destruction that wasteth at noon-day. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand ; but it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked. Because thou hast made the Lord which is thy refuge, even the most high thy habitation : There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling, &c.*

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